



TEXAS COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

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November 2, 1999

Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
The Portals
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the matter of
Closed Captioning Requirements
for Digital Television Receivers

ET Docket No. 99-254

Comments of
David Myers, Executive Director,
Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

My name is David Myers. I am Executive Director of the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TCDHH). I want to thank the Commission for the opportunity to comment on the various aspects of the EIA-708 standard.

The TCDHH's mission is to ensure communication access for the state's 1.6 million population of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The agency administers service delivery programs and the state's interpreter certification program. In addition, the agency administers a program to assist persons with disabilities to obtain equipment needed to access the telephone system. Most of the population served by TCDHH are fully or partially dependent upon closed captioning to follow television programming.

It is the experience of TCDHH that a "one size fits all" approach to adaptation or accommodation unwittingly diminishes the impact or advantage gained from the accommodation. This especially holds true for closed captioning. A singular standard in closed captioning fails to consider the fact that deficits in hearing and vision are many and complex. No standard, regardless of how well designed or written, can meet the individual needs and preferences of all users of captioning services.

The Commission is encouraged to adopt the full EIA-708 standard as opposed to the adoption of only Section 9 which would only maintain the status quo and fail to take advantage of new digital technologies. This is inconsistent with FCC policies as stated in its new Section 255 rules wherein manufacturers are required to incorporate access as early and as consistently as possible in design stages.

TCDHH urges the Commission to re-consider its decision to adopt minimal recommendations contained in Section 9 to allow for the largest possible number

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of viewers to take advantage of captioning by selecting features that meet their individual needs. TCDHH submits that it is not a wise use of resources to make use of a restrictive standard for captioning when the technology is available to deliver the service to a much wider audience.

Size of Captions: The current FCC caption standard does not provide the ability to adjust the size of closed captions. While the current standard does satisfy the size needs of a large number of viewers, it unnecessarily excludes individuals with low vision, including many senior citizens. New digital technologies (and the EIA-708 standard) enable viewers to control the size of captions while the standard proposed by the FCC contained in Section 9 only recommends one standard size of captions. TCDHH urges the FCC to adopt the full EIA-708 standard, which will allow viewers to alter the size of captions the same way the TV's sound volume is commonly adjusted to suit individual needs.

Color: Individuals with low vision differ in their ability to see and use colors. A color that is readily seen by one person may present limitations to another. Section 9 would only require decoders to use solid black backgrounds. In contrast, EIA-708 as a whole would permit users to choose from a variety of foreground and background colors, so that viewers can create contrasts against various backgrounds. The proposed FCC standard as drafted is unnecessarily limiting.

Font: EIA-708, Section 9 proposes only one font. But EIA-708 in its entirety would permit viewers to choose from among 8 different fonts. The FCC should adopt a standard that offers viewers the most choices available with the new digital technologies, especially for those who need different color contrast options to see optimally.

Number of Captioning Services: The FCC's rules currently require decoders to be capable of decoding captioning data for two (2) captioning services at the same time. In fact, most TV receivers can decode up to four (4) captioning streams. The proposed standard - Section 9 - would only require decoders to decode and process data for one captioning service. This is not only too limiting; it actually takes a step backward. The FCC should adopt a standard that requires digital television equipment to decode all of the standard and extended digital services (six (6) standard services and up to 57 additional extended services).

Dual Mode Receivers: We support the FCC's proposal to require DTV receivers to operate in a dual mode (this would decode programming sent in both analog and digital formats). This will be important as we go through the transition from analog to digital TV.

DTV Converter Boxes and Tuners: TCDHH supports the FCC's proposal to require DTV converter boxes and tuners to decode closed captions in either the analog or digital format. This should be required regardless of the size of the television to which the converter or tuner is connected.

Additional Standards: The FCC should take this opportunity to fix some existing problems with television receivers vis-a-vis the processing and display of closed captions. Specifically, the FCC should create the following mandates:

If captions are chosen by the viewer, they should not cut off when the television is turned off or the channel is changed. In other words, consumers should not have to continually turn on captions each time they turn on the TV

or change a channel - rather if captions are chosen, this should become the default mode. The captioning feature and the mute feature should not be connected. A viewer should not have to turn on mute to receive captions. This makes it impossible for mixed (hearing and deaf/hard of hearing) audiences to watch television together. It should be easy to access captions through a button on the remote, and through a first menu of choices. Viewers should not have to go through long menu mazes to figure out how to obtain captions (this is particularly important in hotels and other locations where the viewer is not familiar with the television equipment.)

TCDHH respectfully urges the Commission to adopt a standard that is a true improvement over current captioning standards.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David W. Myers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being the most prominent part.

David W. Myers
Executive Director